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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000727

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/PMBS, DS/IP/EAP, INR/EAP, USIP-SOLOMON,  
DS/DSS/ITA-TCREHAN  
NSC FOR GREEN

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: ASG (IN CONCERT WITH JI) LEADING SUSPECTS IN  
VALENTINE'S DAY BOMBINGS

REF: A. MANILA 705

[B](#). MANILA 247

[C](#). MANILA 682

[D](#). MANILA 630

[E](#). MANILA 463

[F](#). MANILA 645

[G](#). 04 MANILA 5625

Classified By: Political Officer Joseph Saus  
for Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#). (C) The terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) heads the list of prime suspects in the February 14 series of three bombings in Manila and Mindanao that, according to media reports, left at least 11 Filipinos dead and 136 injured. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front has publicly condemned the bombings. The police and military are on their highest alert status. The Arroyo Administration has condemned the attacks, calling for calm among the population. No suspects have been apprehended yet and preliminary investigation of crime scene evidence is underway, with no conclusive findings so far. No Amcits are reported killed or injured. End Summary.

Abu Sayyaf and JI Leading Suspects

[2](#). (C) Abu Solaiman, a key commander of the terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), read a statement on local radio February 14 claiming "our latest operations in Manila, Davao, and GenSan (General Santos), planned and executed with precision by the talented warriors of Islam is our continuing response to the GRP atrocities committed against Muslims everywhere." The diatribe continues to lambaste the GRP, accusing it of "unabated harassment and injustices" invoking anti-Muslim discrimination in Manila (ref B) and the ongoing Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) operations against ASG-linked Misuari Breakaway Group (MBG) fighters on Jolo Island, Sulu Province (refs C,D). (Comment: We judge the ASG claim as credible. Additionally we suspect the close involvement of suspected Jemmah Islamiyah (JI) operatives with reported links to ASG leader Khadafi Janjalani (ref E). While the ASG has a proven track record of inflicting casualties with bombings, the level of coordination and synchronization is reminiscent of the JI-linked multiple bombings in Manila on December 30, 2000. The invocation of the ongoing hostilities against the MBG provides the ASG a convenient excuse and justification for these terrorist acts. End Comment.)

MILF and Others Condemns Attacks

[3](#). (SBU) In an article on its website, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) condemned the attacks, calling the perpetrators "evil men." "We condemn this barbaric act in strongest terms," said Muhammad Ameen Secretary to the Office of MILF Chairman Al Haj Murad Ebrahim. The statement noted, "This is a carnage that dehumanizes human life and dignity." Presidential spokesman Ignacio Bunye called the bombings "despicable acts," adding "we shall not be intimidated, but we must be alert and united in our vigilance." Embassy contact Amina Rasul, convenor of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy, has condemned the attacks calling for the "swift apprehension and punishment of the criminals." Rasul's statement further warns against "opportunists who will exploit the tragedy in order to promote a political agenda..." and calls on "all Muslims to be vigilant, that the name of Islam and Muslims will not be used in these barbaric acts."

Other Bombs?

[4](#). (C) We have no credible indications that these attacks are part of another wave of incidents. However, police in Manila had earlier responded to two bomb-related incidents apart from the three explosions. On February 12, police discovered two rifle grenades in a bag in front of the Japanese Embassy, which is adjacent to the Hyatt Regency

Manila and 1/4 mile from the Embassy's Seafront Residential and General Services Compound on the busy thoroughfare of Roxas Boulevard. Police bomb experts safely removed both devices. On February 14 in the Metro Manila city of Paranaque, patrolling PNP officers observed a plastic bag discarded by an unidentified man who escaped. Police recovered several pieces of explosive material (TNT and C-4) and several detonation devices. The items were individual components and not assembled as an explosive device. (Comment: It is unclear if these two incidents are related to the bombings. It is possible the threat against the Japanese Embassy is linked to Japan's recent immigration crackdown on "entertainer visas" (ref F). End Comment.)

15. (C) PNP officials theorized to RSO that the ASG may have committed the attacks to divert attention from current AFP operations in Sulu Province. But the planning for such events usually takes considerably more time and the linkage between fighting in Sulu and these bombings may be coincidental. It is equally likely that the ASG and JI, smarting from recent failed AFP attacks against their leadership on November 19, 2004 (ref G) and January 27, 2005 (ref E), have been planning these attacks for months now.

Investigation And Arrests: Too Early To Tell?

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16. (C) Legatt reports the crime scenes were largely cleaned up by the morning of February 15. Legatt technical experts at the scene report the Philippine National Police (PNP) did a good job in properly collecting and cataloguing evidence. Seven Australian Federal Police post-blast and forensic experts are enroute to the Philippines to aid in the investigation, and are expected to arrive the evening of February 15. Legatt notes the Australian experts will assess the collected evidence from the attacks and provide assistance to the PNP. We have also offered FBI forensic assistance to the GRP, and a response is pending. The PNP advised us that no arrests have been made. Police authorities released a sketch of two suspects responsible for the Manila bus bombing, and video surveillance film is under review to identify possible suspects. National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales told the media late February 14 it is premature to give an assessment. Both the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the PNP are on their highest alert status. Col. Napoleon Tass, PNP Chief of Intelligence for the National Capitol Region (Metro Manila), when asked about the possible perpetrators of the bombing told PolOff, "Most of the information received thus far points to Muslim extremists. I personally will not qualify which group exactly since we all know that they are in alliance. Whoever they may be, they must be made to pay for the grief they have caused."

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